

---

## EXHIBIT C

---

*Vassar College, Box 142  
Poughkeepsie, NY 12604  
(845) 437-7661; kahite@vassar.edu*

September 28, 2017

To the Judge:

I write this letter of support on behalf of Juan Thompson, who was my student and academic advisee during his four years as an undergraduate political science major at Vassar College (2009-2013). Juan has meant a great deal to me, as he was a prescient, extremely articulate student, a very gifted writer, and a person who often helped me think through pressing issues, including the realities of K-12 public school education, as well as race and racism in the United States. I have learned much from Juan that has made me a more insightful and deliberative observer and participant as a teacher, citizen and human being.

In the fall of 2009 as his freshman adviser, I met Juan on his second day on the Vassar College campus. Juan is the son of a Senegalese father and an African-American mother, and he grew up primarily in St. Louis, Missouri. His high school was predominantly African-American. He told me that second day that landing at the elite campus of Vassar was a bit like landing on another planet, and he asked me, as a white professor, how I understood diversity – somewhat testing me, but also immediately striking me as genuinely curious and kind. We ended up laughing a lot, and that first conversation solidified what would become a strong student-faculty bond through his four years (and he was only one unit short of the degree) and one-two years post-Vassar. Juan earned respect on campus as a political thinker, a strong debater, and a cogent writer, particularly through his powerful, and at times brilliant weekly op-ed pieces for the campus paper. Off campus, Juan was also a popular middle school afterschool tutor and mentor of high school students in the struggling City of Poughkeepsie schools.

Juan knows an unbelievable amount about US party politicians, positions, votes, campaign finance, and platforms, across many states. He is passionate about politics. Juan is also strongly interested in education policy, and he wrote several opinion editorials that threaded broader empirical research with anecdotes from Poughkeepsie classrooms.

In the fall of 2010, Juan declared political science as his major, and I remained his adviser. He was highly regarded among several of my political science colleagues, in a department with a reputation then of being punitive. In spring 2011, Juan was in my “politics of modern social movements” class. When Juan spoke, students leaned forward to listen. Together with two other students, Juan facilitated a charged class discussion on the immigration reform movement and the DREAM Act. He earned an A in the class.

Juan was a junior in my predominantly senior political science seminar on political violence in comparative perspective. He consistently contributed thoughtfully, his weekly essays were insightful, and his final presentation and major research paper on the Chicago-based “Interrupters” organization was a sympathetic critique and contextualizing of an organization challenging gang violence. Juan explored the structural explanations of urban violence, assessed the power of community change agents, and respectfully questioned the appropriateness of the Interrupters’ conceptualizing urban youth and gang violence as a “disease.”

On campus Juan also became an assistant to the Office of Religious and Spiritual Life and was an important facilitator of community dialogues. One of the most memorable experiences I have was when the director of the office, Reverend Sam Speers, asked Juan and me to co-facilitate a discussion of white students and administrators, about how white students think about and relate to students of color at Vassar and in their lives generally. It was an eye-opening experience for both of us. Students opened up and exposed their worries and insecurities about the fact that having grown up and led young lives insulated and separate from non-white communities made them unsure, nervous about how to communicate and develop friendships across race. Their opening up was a testament to Juan’s generosity in that room, as well as his skill as a facilitator of difficult conversations.

I hold onto the several years Juan and I were in close touch, as I know him to be capable of so much possibility. I have had a heavy heart about his past two years, but I plan to be supportive of his accessing the treatment, care, and resources to attempt to ensure positive change in his life.

Sincerely,

Katherine Hite  
Professor of Political Science on the Frederick Ferris Thompson Chair  
Vassar College